

Saturday Magazine.

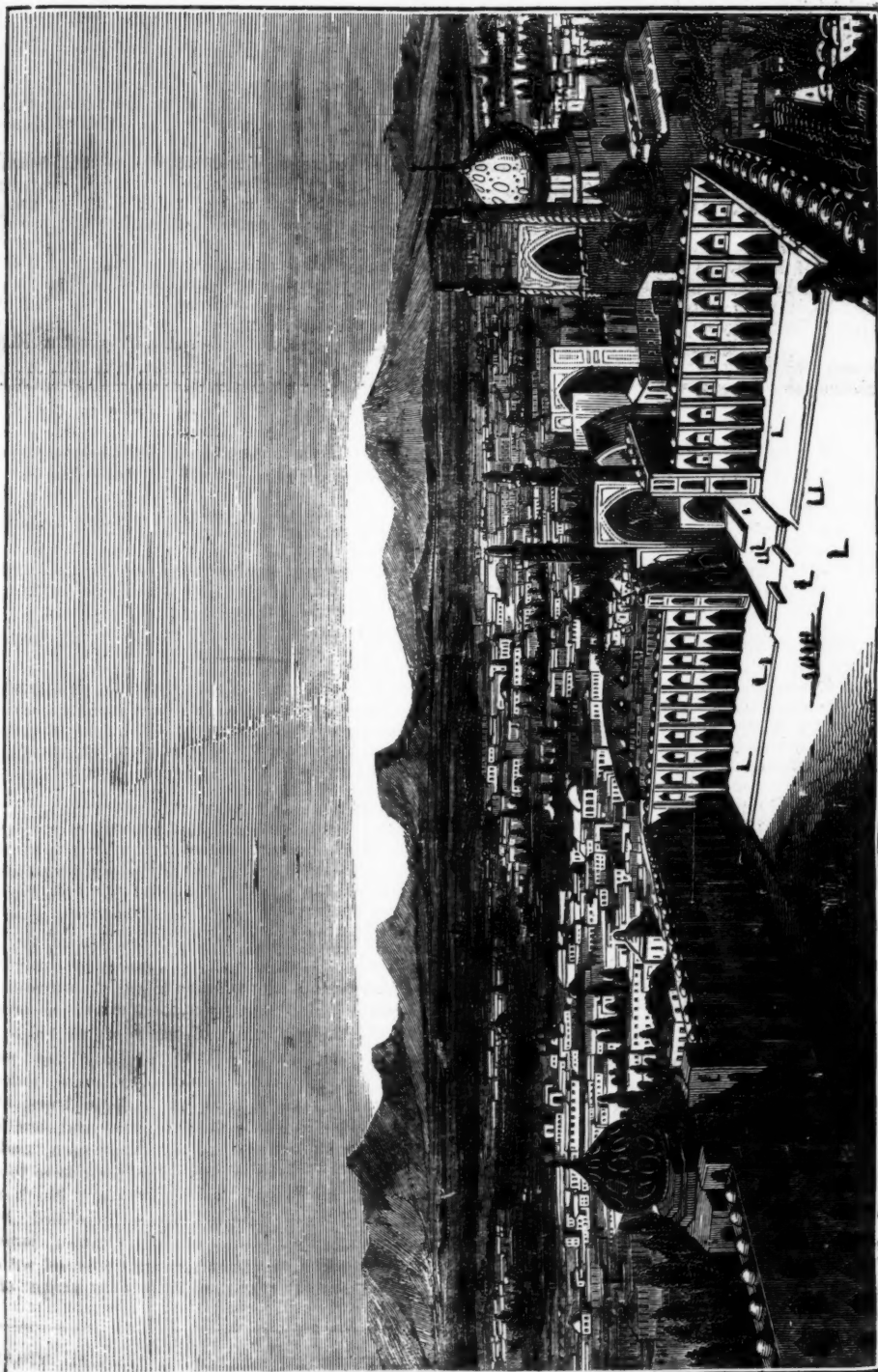
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[Royal Mosque.]

GENERAL VIEW OF THE CITY OF ISFAHAN.

[Mosque of Loft Allah.]

SOME ACCOUNT OF THE CITY OF ISFAHAN.

THE CITY OF ISFAHAN.

ISFAHAN, Isfahan, or Spahawn, (for, like most eastern names, it is spelt by Europeans in various ways,) the chief town of the Persian province of Irak, and for ages the capital of the Persian monarchy, was long distinguished for opulence and splendour, in a region which has always been remarkable for the wealth and magnificence of its cities. It is now much fallen from the high condition which it then enjoyed; it has ceased to be the royal residence, and its streets no longer display the same picture of prosperity that characterized them in the days of its former grandeur. Still, however, it is the most populous place in the kingdom of Persia; and, even in its present desolation, has much to excite the interest and admiration of the traveller.

ITS EARLY HISTORY.

THE origin of Isfahan is not to be traced with any certainty. By some the city is supposed to have arisen from the ruins of Hecatompylos, the metropolis of the ancient kingdom of Parthia; while, by others, it is identified with the Aspadana of the geographer Ptolemy. It is mentioned in history at an early period of the Christian æra: and under the rule of the Caliphs of Bagdad, who conquered Persia soon after the birth of Mohammedanism, and compelled its inhabitants to embrace that religion, it was a place of considerable importance. When Timour, or Tamerlane, invaded Persia, Isfahan surrendered, the moment he encamped before it, and, appeased by this ready submission, the conqueror spared the town, but imposed a heavy contribution on its inhabitants. An accident, however, unhappily changed its destiny. The sound of a drum, which a young blacksmith was beating for his amusement one night, was mistaken for an alarm; a number of the citizens assembled, and became so irritated from a communication to each other of the distress which their subjection occasioned them, that they at once commenced an attack upon their oppressors. Before morning nearly 3000 of the Tartars, who had been quartered in the city, were slain; the gates were then shut, to prevent an immediate assault, for to maintain a successful defence was hopeless.

The rage of Timour, on hearing the fate of his soldiers, exceeded all bounds; he would listen to no terms of capitulation, and Isfahan was doomed to be an example of the fate which awaited the cities that should dare to oppose him in his career of conquest. The unfortunate inhabitants knew what they had to expect, and despair increased the strength of their resistance; but their struggles were vain—the walls were carried by storm, and the cruel conqueror, not content with permitting pillage and slaughter, commanded that every one of his soldiers should bring him a certain number of heads. Of these no less than 70,000 were afterwards piled in pyramids, as monuments of his savage revenge: to compute the whole number of the slain was found impossible.

This event, which occurred in 1387, is recorded by Timour in his Institutes, or Memoirs, with characteristic conciseness. "I conquered," he says, "the city of Isfahan, and I trusted in the people of Isfahan; and I delivered the castle into their hands, and they rebelled; and the Darogah, whom I had placed over them, they slew, with three thousand of the soldiers; and I also commanded that a general slaughter should be made of the people of Isfahan."

ITS CONDITION UNDER SHAH* ABBAS THE GREAT.

THE most renowned monarch that ever sat upon the throne of Persia is Abbas I. surnamed the Great, who reigned from 1585 to 1628. His name is one of the few that survive in the memory of his countrymen; and he occupies the same place in their stories that the celebrated Caliph Haroon-al-Raschid holds in the well-known tales of the Arabians. Moreover, he is, by common consent, the builder of all bridges, caravanserais, and palaces throughout his dominions, and, indeed, the author of every improvement in ancient times. To Isfahan in particular he was a great benefactor; he fixed on that city as the capital of his dominions, and its population was more than doubled during his

reign. Its principal mosque, the noble palace of Chehel Sitoon, the beautiful avenues and palaces called the Chahar-Baah, or "Four Gardens," the principal bridge over the river Zeinderood, and several of the finest palaces in the city and its suburbs, all owe their origin to this sovereign. A minute account of his works is given by the French traveller, Sir John Chardin, who visited Persia at different periods between 1664 and 1677; but the following sketch, from the pen of Sir Robert Ker Porter, will convey a more lively impression of the condition of the city than any detailed description.

"During his reign, nearly a million of people animated its busy streets, and the equally flourishing peasantry of more than fourteen villages in its neighbourhood, supplied, by their labour, the markets of this abundant population. Its bazars were filled with merchandise from every quarter of the globe, mingled with the rich bales of its own celebrated manufactories. Industry, diligence, activity, and business-like negotiations, were seen and heard every where. The caravanserais were crowded with merchants and goods of Europe and of Asia; while the court of the great Shah was the resort of ambassadors from the proudest kingdoms, not only of the east but of the west. Travellers thronged thither to behold its splendours, and to enjoy the gracious reception bestowed by its monarch on the learned and ingenious of all lands and religions. He endowed mosques with the splendour of palaces, while his gardens, open to the people, resounded with fêtes and revelling."

ITS CAPTURE BY THE AFFGHANS.

It was in the year 1722, during the reign of Shah Sultan Hussein, that Mahmood, the ruler of the tribes known by the name of Affghans, having defeated the Persian army in a pitched battle, advanced to attack Isfahan. The consternation that reigned throughout the city was extreme; the king called a council, at which it was determined that he should remain in his capital, and preparations were accordingly made for its defence. New levies were raised, the ruinous parts of the walls were repaired; intrenchments were thrown up at the most exposed points, and especial care was taken to fortify the bridges, by which a communication is kept up between Isfahan on the northern, and its suburbs on the southern bank, of the river Zeinderood.

But the weakness of the Shah, and the incapacity of his ministers, rendered all his resources of no avail. In the suburb of Julfa, there dwelt a colony of Armenians, which had grown up to a high pitch of prosperity, under the fostering care of the great Abbas and his immediate successors; of late years, however, it had suffered much injury, and been treated with every kind of indignity. The bravery of these Christian merchants was unquestioned, and now that danger threatened their sovereign, none surpassed them in zeal on his behalf; but the Persians were mindful of the oppression which they had practised on this unhappy people, and distrusting, naturally enough, those whom they had injured, resolved to disarm them. The king was made to declare that he had more reliance on the valour and loyalty of the Armenians, than on any other of his subjects, and that to them he should intrust the guard of his royal person; but when, in obedience to his command, they appeared before his palace, they were ordered to lay down their arms and depart.

Julfa, thus deprived of the means of defence, could not long resist the assault of the Affghans; and the brave Armenians were compelled to capitulate on very severe terms. Mahmood then commenced his operations on Isfahan itself; but having failed in an attack on one of the principal bridges, he fell back, and made overtures for a peace. These were rejected; and the fierce Affghan employed himself for the next month, in ravaging the country round about. He then renewed the attack, and having gained one of the bridges, spread his troops on all sides of the city, resolving to trust for its reduction to the famine which had commenced soon after his first approach, and was increasing every day. His anticipations were correct; the scarcity within Isfahan grew gradually to such an extent, that the populace became unmanageable; and the unhappy Shah sent a deputation to Mahmood, offering to accept the terms which he had formerly rejected. "The king of Persia," replied the proud Affghan, "offers

* Shah is the title of the Persian monarch.

me nothing that is in his disposal. Himself and all his family are within my power; and he is no longer master of the three provinces which he so generously desire: to bestow upon me. It is the fate of the whole empire that must be decided between us."

The condition of the inhabitants now became quite hopeless; but the inhuman policy of Mahmood led him to procrastinate the siege. His army was not large, and its safety would be endangered if he entered the city while the Persians so far exceeded it in numbers; he resolved, therefore, that many of the poor citizens should perish by hunger before he signed the treaty. "What heart can reflect without horror," exclaims the old traveller, Jonas Hanway, "on the dreadful circumstances of the famine caused by this artful conduct! In the month of August, horses, mules, and other beasts of burden, were become so excessively dear, that none but the king and the principal lords about him, or some of the wealthiest inhabitants, could afford to eat of them. Notwithstanding the aversion which the Persians have, from their religion, for dogs, and some other animals, which they look upon as unclean, yet as many as they could find were consumed in a few days. The people afterwards fed on the bark of trees, leaves, and leather, which they softened with boiling water; but when this sad resource was also exhausted, they had no other support than human flesh. What pencil can describe their hollow eyes, their trembling knees, their emaciated bodies! The streets, the public squares, and the very gardens of the palace, were strewed with dead bodies, which none had the heart or strength to bury. The water of the Zeinderood was so corrupted by the number of carcasses thrown into it, that it was not potable; and, in a less wholesome climate, the air must have been infected to that degree, as to destroy what few inhabitants were left alive."

For two months did this misery continue. At length, on the 21st of October, the king, clad in deep mourning, came out of his palace, and walking through the principal streets of Isfahan, bewailed aloud the misfortunes of his reign. On the morrow, he abdicated his throne, and quitted the city for the Afghan camp, attended by some of his nobles, and about three hundred troops. "They moved on slowly," says Hanway, "with their eyes fixed on the ground; the few inhabitants who had strength to see this mournful cavalcade, expressed their grief by a gloomy silence, which presaged the sad effects of this melancholy event."

The following year was marked by a dreadful massacre of the Persians in Isfahan, arising from Mahmood's alarm lest his army should be overpowered. But in 1729, the city was taken by the troops of the celebrated Nadir, who expelled the Afghans from Persia, and afterwards mounted the throne of that kingdom. In the numerous convulsions which have distracted the empire since that period, it has fallen into the hands of various parties; but never has it recovered from the calamities which it suffered under the merciless rule of the barbarian Afghans.

SITUATION AND EXTENT.

ISFAHAN, as we have before remarked, stands on the northern bank of the Zeinderood; its suburbs, Julfa and Abbasabad being on the southern. This river is not of any magnitude, except in the spring-season, when the melting of the mountain-snows swells the volume of its waters into a respectable size; but the large daily supply that is afterwards drawn off through the dikes cut for the irrigation of the neighbouring country, soon reduces it to an insignificant stream, flowing through its stony bed in two or three narrow channels, each not exceeding thirty or forty feet in breadth, and so shallow as to be fordable in a hundred places. It has its rise in the mountains to the west, and after passing through the city, is said to be absorbed in the sand-desert to the south-east. In Chardin's time, Isfahan, together with its suburbs, was "one of the largest cities in the world, not less than twenty-four miles in circumference;" the present circuit of the inhabited city scarcely exceeds one quarter of that extent. It was formerly surrounded by a mud wall; but that was entirely destroyed by the Afghans.

The approach to the city from the south, is through a desolate tract called the *Hezzar Derreh*, or Thousand Valleys, which, according to Persian tradition, is the scene of the battles between Roostem* and the dragon, to whose poisonous exhalations its barrenness is attributed. The

traveller from Shiraz enters it in this direction, and obtains his first view of this great metropolis from an eminence about five miles distant; there it bursts at once upon his sight in all the splendour of its glittering domes and lofty palaces, a picture, indeed, of gorgeous magnificence, well seeming to excuse the Persian's proud boast, that Isfahan is "half the world." Near this spot is to be seen a small round monument covered with a cupola, and marked with an inscription in the Cufick character; it is called the Tower of the *Shatir*, or running footman. Chardin says that those who aspired to enter into the service of the king in that capacity, were obliged, as a proof of their strength and activity, to accomplish twelve separate journeys from the gate of the royal palace to this pillar, and back, between the rising and setting of the sun, or a distance of 120 miles in about fourteen hours. Local tradition, however, ascribes to it the following origin.

In former days, a king of Persia promised to give his daughter in marriage to any one who would run on foot before him, while he rode on horseback, from Shiraz to Isfahan. One of his Shatirs accepted the offer, and nearly accomplished the task; but when he reached the eminence marked by the tower, the king began to fear lest he should be called upon to redeem his pledge, and had recourse to the expedient of dropping his whip. The man's body was so encompassed with ligatures, and in a state of such excitement, that if he had stooped, his death must immediately have followed: he knew this, and contriving therefore to take up the whip with his foot, he carried it to his hand, and presented it to his master. The monarch more alarmed than before, now dropped his ring. The poor Shatir saw that his doom was sealed, and he met it bravely; for exclaiming, "O king! you have broken your word, but I will show you my submission to the last;" he stooped, picked up the ring, and died.

A near approach destroys much of the impression that is created by the first appearance of Isfahan. Its desolation is not observable at a distance, for the groves and avenues, and spreading orchards with which this capital abounds, screen its many ruins, and allow only its palaces, and mosques, and loftier buildings, to be seen. But it is a melancholy sight that meets the eye of the traveller as he draws near to what is now the city, and passes through large deserted tracts, covered with houses in different stages of decay,—among which, at wide intervals, may be discovered a few inhabited dwellings. "One might suppose," says Mr. Morier, "that God's curse had extended over parts of this city, as it did over Babylon. Houses, bazars, mosques, palaces, whole streets, are to be seen in total abandonment; and I have rode for miles among its ruins, without meeting with any living creature, except, perhaps, a jackal peeping over a wall, or a fox running to his hole."

STREETS, &c.

THE streets of Isfahan differ not much, in general appearance, from those of other cities in Persia, but they have very little resemblance to those of European capitals. They are, for the most part, narrow, dirty, and crooked, and possess an air of extreme dulness. The shops are all to be found in the bazars, which, to a stranger, are the most amusing place of resort, and which are so extensive as to enable him to walk under cover for two or three miles together. "Many of the scenes so familiar to us in the Arabian Nights," says Mr. Morier, "are here realized. —The young Christian merchant; the lady of quality, attended by her eunuch and her she-slave; the Jewish physician, the *dawal*, or erier, showing goods about; the barber Alnascar, sitting with his back against the wall in a very little shop; and thus almost every character may be met with." The shops are merely receptacles for the goods of the trader, who returns every night to his dwelling in some other part of the city.

The chief square of Isfahan is the *Maidan Shah*, which was formerly surrounded by busy shops, and regarded as one of the chief ornaments of this great city; its length is about 2,600 feet, and its breadth 700. Each side of it presents a double range of arches, and has its centre adorned with some edifice remarkable for grandeur or for character; two of these fronts may be seen in the engraving contained in page 161. The domed building to the left is the mosque of Looft Allah, on the north-eastern side of the quadrangle; that to the right, or on the south-east, is the Mesjed Shah, a superb edifice, built by Shah Abbas the Great. On the north-west stands the great

* A celebrated hero,—a sort of Persian Hercules, the boast and glory of his countrymen.

gate, or rather tower of entrance to the royal bazar; and on the south-west is the Ali Capi, or gate of Ali, from which our view is taken. Immediately over this gate is a large chamber, which is open on all sides but one, and thus looks out in almost every direction. On the side nearest to the balustrade that faces the square, a raised platform marks the spot where, in former days, the Great Shah Abbas was wont to place his royal seat, and thence review his troops galloping and skirmishing beneath, or witness the combats of wild animals, or behold his people gaily enjoying their favourite sports, anxious to exhibit their strength and agility under the royal eye. From the roof of this building an extensive view of the city is obtained, but the spectator is somewhat too near. In the days of its ancient prosperity, the picture must have been splendid; it is now a saddening sight, for one of its prominent features is a vast great heap of mouldering ruins, which tell a melancholy tale of former grandeur and present desolation.

HOUSES.

THE houses of Isfahan consist of only one story, and have seldom any windows looking into the street; a circumstance to which much of the dull monotonous appearance of the public thoroughfares must be ascribed. They are flat-roofed, and built of brick, and have each a small court, which is shut in by a high wall, and to which a part of the sitting-rooms are entirely open, though furnished with a large curtain, to be let down when they are not in use. But if the dwellings have little height, they are composed of so many compartments, that even the meanest of them cover a considerable extent of ground. The only entrance is usually by one gate, which takes its character pretty much from the rank and station of its owner. A poor man's door is scarcely three feet in height; and this, we are told, is a measure of precaution, adopted to hinder the servants of the great from entering it on horseback, which they would make no scruple to do when perpetrating any act of oppression.

The houses of the nobility and public officers are generally splendid, and may vie with some of the palaces of the monarch. The court, into which the outer gate opens, is generally large, and laid out in walks, having their sides planted with flowers, and refreshed by fountains. To this court all the principal apartments of the mansion, which are inhabited by men, open: and adjoining to it, but completely distinct, is a smaller court, around which are the inner apartments belonging to the females of the family. Almost every dwelling of any consequence in Isfahan has a garden attached to it; and this, while it adds to the beauty and salubrity of the city, must greatly increase its extent, and enable us the more readily to credit the statement of Chardin, that, in its more prosperous days, its walls were twenty-four miles in circumference.

GARDENS AND PALACES.

ONE of the most noble ornaments of Isfahan is the Chahar Bagh, or "Four Gardens," a superb avenue 3000 paces in length, and seventy in breadth, which extending on either side of the Zeinderood, approaches, with a gentle declivity, both ends of the principal bridge across that river. It is planted with double rows of the lofty chenar, — a species of sycamore, with a verdure like that of the plane, — of which the Persians are extremely fond, and which grows here in great perfection. On the borders are built a number of private palaces, which, though uninhabited for more than a century, are still in good repair, and contribute much to the beauty of the city. The style of their architecture is light and pleasing, as may be seen from our engraving in page 165, though it is neither regular nor magnificent; and their situation gives them at a distance a very picturesque effect. The gardens, which are situated on either side of this avenue, are very beautiful, and are called by the Persians the *Hesht Beheste*, or eight paradises. They are laid out in regular walks, shaded by even rows of tall umbrageous chenars, interspersed with a variety of fruit-trees, and every kind of flowering-shrub. Canals flow down the avenues in the same undeviating lines, and generally terminate in some large marble basin ornamented with sparkling fountains. The effect is described as grand; and it is much increased by the occasional glimpses which various openings permit, of the glittering palaces which ornament this charming spot.

The finest palace in Isfahan is the *Chehel Siton*, or Palace of Forty Pillars, which, as we before observed, was

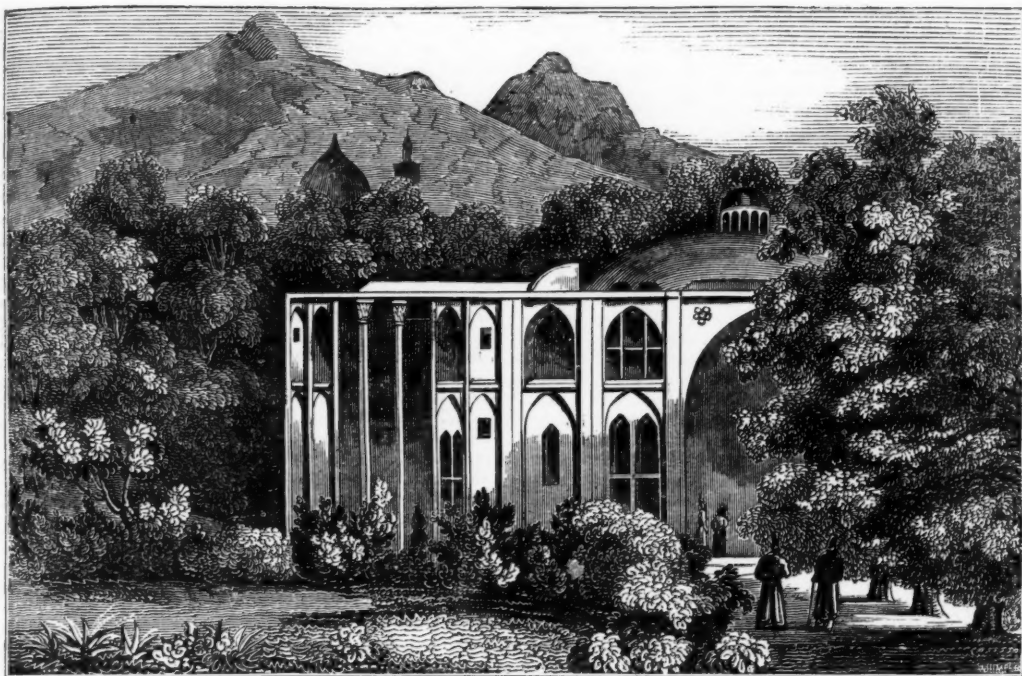
built by Shah Abbas the Great. It stands in the middle of an immense square, which is intersected by various canals, and planted in different directions with the beautiful chenar tree. Before it, is spread a large sheet of water, from the furthest extremity of which, the palace is, we are told, "beautiful beyond either the power of language or the correctness of pencil to delineate." The entire front of the building is open to the garden, the roof being sustained by a double range of columns, exceeding forty feet in height, and each shooting up from the united backs of four lions of white marble. The shafts of the columns rising from these extraordinary bases are covered with Arabesque patterns and foliage in looking-glass, gilding, and painting; some twisting spirally, others winding in golden wreaths, or running into lozenges, stars, and various fanciful devices of ingenious workmanship. The ceiling is decorated in a similar style, its ornaments being still beautifully fresh and brilliant, and the floor is covered with a carpet of the richest material, which is of the same date as the building, and far superior in texture to those of the present day. From this saloon an arched recess leads into an extensive hall, "in which" we are told, "all the caprices, and labours, and cost of Eastern magnificence, have been lavished, to an incredible prodigality." This banquetting chamber, (for that such it was, is indicated by the character of its decorations,) has its walls embellished by six large paintings, which, though designed without the smallest knowledge of perspective, and in many respects ridiculous, are yet invaluable as registers of the manners of the age in which they were executed, of the general aspect of the persons they are designed to commemorate, and of the costumes of the several nations assembled at the feasts, or engaged in the battles which they represent.

Many of the palaces which existed in Chardin's time, are still perfect; and some new ones have been erected within the present century, by one of the governors of Isfahan, who having risen from the humble station of a small shopkeeper, to the high rank of one of the king's ministers, was indefatigable in his efforts to improve the condition of his native city. No buildings can be more striking than some of these palaces. The front room or hall is in general very open, and supported by pillars that are carved and gilded in the most exquisite manner; while the large glass windows, through which it receives a mellow light, are curiously stained with a variety of colours. Before each of these palaces is an open space with a fountain, near which the domestics stand to watch the looks and words of the lord of the dwelling, who is generally seated at one of the windows. We have given a representation of one of them in page 168.

MOSQUES AND COLLEGES.

IN the time of Chardin, the walls of Isfahan contained no less than 162 mosques and 48 colleges; most of these are still standing, in various stages of repair. Of the former, the principal is the Mesjed Shah, or Royal Mosque, which was built by Shah Abbas the Great, and dedicated to Mehedi, one of the twelve Imaams, or descendants of Mohammed. It is related that the king was unable to complete the structure for want of materials, and that he proposed to despoil one of the existing mosques, which then held the principal rank among the sacred edifices of the city; he was, however, diverted from this purpose by the arguments of the priests, who represented to him, that if he wished to ensure durability for his new temple, it behoved him not to demolish the works of his predecessors, in order to obtain its completion, inasmuch as his successors would think themselves justified, if, for a like object, they treated his works in a like manner.

The outer entrance to this mosque is a lofty portico, which will be seen by a reference to the engraving in page 161, occupies the centre of the south-eastern side of the Royal Square. On each side is a lofty minaret, having an open gallery at its top; and in the centre is the doorway, closed by a pair of folding gates, about 12 feet in breadth, and of a height in proportion, and eased with plates of pure silver, which are marked with inscriptions from the Koran, and decorated with characteristic ornaments in relief. This noble entrance, across which an iron chain is thrown, to prevent the near approach of horses and cattle, leads to the great court of the mosque, at the end of which stands the body of the edifice, surmounted by a vast dome, which is accounted one of the most beautiful specimens of Persian architecture. This, and the whole of the numerous ranges of building which surround it, are constructed of massive



PRIVATE PALACE IN THE CHAHAR BAGH, AT ISFAHAN.

blocks of stone, covered with tiles, richly lacquered, and bearing the usual inscriptions of sentences from the Korán. The interior of this mosque is richly decorated, and is said to possess much grandeur and solemnity.

The mosque of Looft Allah, which occupies the north-eastern side of the square, and is also represented in our engraving, is a more simple building than the Mesjed Shah; but the workmanship is, throughout, of the best kind, both in the solid masonry and in the light elegant decorations. The beautiful marble of Tabreez, which is celebrated for its yellow hue, and its transparency, is employed in different parts of the structure in large blocks, highly polished; and the walls of the interior, together with the ceiling of the dome, are embellished in the usual style. The exterior fronts, the portals, and the arch of the door, are all covered with lacquered tiles, marked, according to the ordinary practice, with various inscriptions.

Of the colleges, the most remarkable is that known by the name of the *Medresse Jeddah*. Its entrance is very handsome; a lofty portico, enriched with pillars fantastically twisted, leads through a pair of immense folding gates, made of solid brass, richly ornamented with pure silver, like the gates of the royal mosque, and having their surface highly carved and embossed with flowers, and verses from the Korán; these open into a vestibule with a domed roof, which at once conducts into the spacious court of the college, planted thickly with flowers, and overshadowed by lines of lofty trees. The right side of this square is occupied by the mosque, which is still a beautiful building, faced by two minarets and surmounted by a dome, the interior of which is richly spread with variegated tiles, bearing on them invocations to Mohammed, and verses of the Korán in the fullest profusion. The other sides of the square are occupied, one by a lofty and beautiful portico, and the remaining two by rooms for the students, twelve in each front, arranged in two stories. These apartments are little square cells, spread with carpets, "and appeared to me," says Mr. Morier, "admirably calculated for study; indeed, the quiet and retirement of this college, the beauty and serenity of the climate, and the shrubbery and water in the courts, would have combined to constitute it in my eyes a sanctuary for learning, and a nursery for the learned, if it had been in any other country."

When Sir R. K. Porter visited Isfahan, there were about a hundred students inhabiting this college; they receive their education free of expense to themselves, the *moolah*, or "learned man," who instructs them, being paid by the government.

INHABITANTS.

THE population of Isfahan was once very large. In the time of Chardin, the highest estimate was 1,100,000; but this, by a more moderate calculation, was reduced to 600,000. In the statements of modern writers there is considerable discrepancy. According to Olivier, the number of inhabitants had fallen, in 1796, to 50,000; but the restoration of tranquillity and public security, raised it, in 1800, to 100,000. Mr. Morier, in his first journey, computes it to be 400,000, because the second minister of the king, a native of the city, and long its governor, informed him that there were 80,000 families; he adds, however, that much must be allowed for the exaggeration of a Persian. The same gentleman, on his second journey, rated the population at only 60,000, his calculation being founded on the number of sheep killed for the consumption of the city. Mr. Kinneir, in his *Geographical Memoir*, states it at 200,000, and this is generally received as the most probable account.

The inhabitants are quick and intelligent, and differ much, both in appearance and character, from the peasantry who dwell in the villages around. Almost every man above the very lowest order can read and write, and artizans and shopkeepers are often as familiar as those of the higher ranks with the works of their favourite poets. The people are, in general, active and industrious; but they are usually classed with the inhabitants of Cashan, and some other cities, as remarkable for their cowardice. They have, indeed, at all times been more celebrated as silk-weavers, than as warriors, and are now considered as the best manufacturers and the worst soldiers in Persia.

When Nadir Shah returned to Persia from his invasion of India, he published a proclamation, permitting the followers of his army to return to their homes. It is related, that 30,000 of them who belonged to Cashan and Isfahan, applied to the monarch for a guard of a hundred musketeers, to escort them safe to their wives and children. "Cowards," exclaimed Nadir, in a fury, "would I were a robber again, for the sake of waylaying and plundering you all. Is not my success a miracle," continued he to those around him, "with such a set of dastards in my camp?"

RELIGION.

THE inhabitants of Isfahan, and the Persians generally, are Mohammedans, of the sect called *Shiahs*, or followers of Ali, who are considered as heretics by the Turks and Arabs, and others holding the Soonee doctrine. The difference between these two rival sects arises thus. When Mohammed died, the succession to his power was disputed

between Ali, his son-in-law and cousin, and Aboubeker, his father-in-law; but the fortunes of the latter prevailed, and he reigned for two years and a half. Omar succeeded him, and was followed by Osman, and, on the death of the latter, Ali was restored to what he deemed his long-lost rights. The Shiāhs maintain that he ought to have succeeded to the caliphate at the death of Mohammed; and, consequently, they consider Aboubeker, Omar, and Osman as usurpers, and deny all the traditions which rest upon their authority. These, on the other hand, are upheld by the Soonees, who hold those rulers to be beyond all others the most entitled to the regard and veneration of posterity. This, and other minor points of difference, cause a rancorous and irreconcilable hostility between the two sects; and names which are never mentioned but with blessings by the one, are hourly cursed by the other.

The Christian religion has at no time made any progress in Persia, though the kingdom has been visited by many missionaries. There is, amid the mountains of Koor-distan*, a small colony of Nestorians; and a Roman Catholic mission has long been established at Isfahan. We have already mentioned the colony of Armenians, who dwell in the suburb of Julfa; they enjoy the free exercise of their religion, and divine service is performed in several of their churches weekly. The Jews in Persia are not numerous, and are scorned and condemned by the inhabitants. The Guebres, or "worshippers of fire," are scarcely treated with less rigour; they have, consequently, been compelled either to emigrate to India, or to abjure the religion of their ancestors, and a few families in the towns of Kerman and Yezd are all that now remain of the disciples of Zoroaster.

Like other followers of the Mohammedan faith, the Persians are extremely superstitious; and all of them, from the peasant to the prince, place unbounded faith in astrological predictions. Amulets and talismans are at all times worn about their persons, and nothing is done by a man of any consequence or property without reference to the stars. If any measure is to be adopted, if a voyage or journey is to be commenced, if a new dress is to be put on,—the almanack and astrologer must be consulted and the lucky moment discovered.

A curious instance of this, is mentioned by Sir John Malcolm, who gives it on the authority of the late Dr. Jukes, long a resident in Persia, and an eye-witness of the whole transaction. In the year 1806, when a Persian ambassador was about to proceed to India, he was informed by his astrologer, of a most fortunate conjunction of the stars, which if missed, was not likely to occur again for some months. He instantly determined, that though he could not embark, as the ship was not ready that was to carry him, to move from his house in the town of Bushire, to his tents, which were pitched at a village, five miles off, to receive him. It was, however, discovered by the astronomer, that he could neither be allowed to go out of the door of his own dwelling, nor at the gate of the fort, as an invisible but baneful constellation was exactly opposite, and shed dangerous influence in that direction. To remedy this, a large aperture was made in the wall of his house; but that only opened into his neighbour's; and four or five more walls were to be cut through, before the ambassador and his friends could reach the street. They then went to the beach, intending to take a boat, and proceed two miles by sea, in order that their backs might be turned on the dreaded constellation; but the sea was rough, and the party hesitated encountering a real danger, to avoid an imaginary one. In this dilemma, the governor was solicited to allow a part of the wall of the town to be thrown down, that a mission, on which so much depended, might not be exposed to misfortune. The request, extraordinary as it may appear, was complied with, and the cavalcade marched over the breach to their tents.

The following extract, from the *Sketches of Persia*, contains a lively description of the attention paid to astrological predictions, on the occasion of the entry of the British mission into Teheran.

"The period of entering Teheran, had been long fixed by the Elchee†, who had consulted an eminent astrologer, at Isfahan, upon this subject. The wise man, after casting his nativity, and comparing what he found written in the book of his destiny, with the object of his mission, which he had been told was the establishment of friendly

intercourse with Persia, declared by a paper, given under his hand, for which he had no doubt received a handsome fee, 'That provided the Elchee entered the gate of Teheran, at forty-five minutes past two o'clock, P.M., on the 13th of November, 1806, success would attend his negotiation, and he would accomplish all his wishes.'"

The best chronometer in the party, was placed in the hands of Meerza Aga Meer, one of the Persians attached to the mission, whose situation enabled him to ride in the procession, sufficiently near the Elchee, to prompt him to go a little faster or slower, in order that the gate of the capital, might be entered at the exact moment. "The crowds of people we now saw," continues the writer, "announced that we were in the suburbs of Teheran. I heard Aga Meer whisper the Elchee, 'You have yet ten minutes—a little slower. Quicker!' was afterwards pronounced in an under-tone. Again I heard 'Slower!'—then 'Now!' and the charger of the Elchee put his foot over the threshold of the gate of Teheran. 'Al hamd-cool illāh! Thanks be to God!' said the Meer, with a delighted countenance; 'it was the very moment,—how fortunate!' This sentiment was general among the Persians, in our suite. Some of them might have doubted the sincerity of the Elchee's belief in the occult sciences, but even these were pleased at the consideration given to what he deemed their prejudices."

COSTUME.

It is remarked as extraordinary that an Asiatic nation so much charmed by show and brilliancy, and possessed of so lively an imagination as the Persians are, should have adopted for their apparel the dark and sombre hues which are now universal among all ranks, and give them an appearance of melancholy, so much at variance with the character of their real temperament. Under the rule of the race of kings who preceded the present dynasty, their dress displayed an air of gaiety; but at present, brown, olive, green, and blue, of dark tints, are the prevailing colours. Their chief garments are—a pair of very wide trousers, reaching below the ankle—a shirt extending a few inches below the hips, over the trowsers—a tight vest, descending to the middle of the leg, and furnished with sleeves, extending to the wrist, but open at the elbows—and a long vest reaching to the ankle, but fitting tight to the body only as far as the hips, and then buttoning at the side. Around the waist is bound a sash, of Cashmerian shawl, or of the common shawl of the country, or of English chintz, or of flowered muslin; its size, when unrolled, being about eight yards long and one broad. In this is stuck a small dagger, ornamented according to the wealth of the possessor, and exhibiting all gradations between an enamelled pommel set in precious stones, and a common handle of bone or wood. The head-dress is a black sheep-skin cap, about one foot and a half high, which used formerly to be encircled with a shawl; but, at present, this is a distinction confined to a privileged few. The coverings for the feet are very carefully attended to. In winter, a thick woollen sock is worn; and in the air, or during a journey, the legs and feet are bound round with a long bandage of cloth, which is increased with the advance of the cold. The slipper is remarkable for turning up at the toe, and for its formidable iron heels, which are an inch and a half in height, and are often used as an instrument of punishment by beating with them on the offender's mouth.

Jewels are not generally worn, except by the king, who displays them with an excessive profusion. His subjects assert that when the monarch is dressed in his most splendid robes, and is seated in the sun, the eye cannot gaze on the dazzling brilliancy of his attire; and the truth of this boast is well confirmed in the following extract from the *Sketches of Persia*, referring to the occasion of the audience given to the envoy of the Governor-general of India. "His dress baffled all description. The ground of his robes was white; but he was so covered with jewels of an extraordinary size, and their splendour, from his being seated where the rays of the sun played upon them, was so dazzling, that it was impossible to distinguish the minute parts which combined to give such amazing brilliancy to his whole figure." Perhaps no monarch in the universe possesses jewels of equal value with those of the king of Persia; the finest of them were plundered by Nadir Shah from the imperial treasury of Delhi. Among them is the "sea of light," which weighs one hundred and eighty-six carats, and is considered to be the diamond of the finest lustre in the world; the "crown of the moon," weighing one hundred

* See the *Saturday Magazine*, Vol. IV., p. 69.

† The Persians call an ambassador, Elchee.

and forty-six carats, is also a splendid stone. These two are the principal in a pair of bracelets valued at near a million sterling; those in the crown are also of extraordinary size and value.

This notice of the costume of the Persians would be incomplete without some mention of that very important ornament of their faces—the beard. The hair is completely shaven from their heads, with the exception of a small tuft on the crown, and two locks behind the ears; but their beards are allowed to grow, and to reach a much larger size than with the Turks, as well as to spread more about the ears and temples. Indeed the attention with which a Persian cultivates this cherished appendage to his chin is of the most anxious kind; and if he can succeed in rendering it remarkable for its length, the rich blackness of its hue, or the fine glossy smoothness of its texture, the consideration which it then obtains him is deemed the ample reward of his exertions. But this enviable distinction is not to be lightly purchased, for the operation of dyeing the beard black, according to the almost universal custom, is unpleasant in itself, and must be repeated once a fortnight. It is always performed in the hot bath, because the hair, being well saturated with moisture, then imbibes the colour better. A thick paste of Khenna is first plastered in profusion over the beard, and allowed to remain an hour; it is then washed off, leaving the hair of a very strong orange colour, bordering upon that of brickdust. A similar paste of indigo powder is then employed in the same manner; but this second process, to be well executed, requires two full hours. During the whole of the operation, the patient lies quietly flat upon his back; whilst the dye (especially the indigo, which is a great astringent) contracts the features of his face in a very mournful manner, and causes all the lower part of his visage to smart and burn. When the indigo is at last washed off, the beard is of a very dark bottle-green, and becomes a jet-black only after being exposed to the air for four-and-twenty hours.

MANNERS AND USAGES.

The inhabitants of Isfahan, like their countrymen in general, are extremely affable and polite; and they possess the same liveliness of imagination and volubility of tongue which has gained for their nation the appellation of the Frenchmen of Asia. The higher ranks among this people are most carefully instructed in all that belongs to exterior manner and deportment. "Nothing," says Sir John Malcolm, "can exceed their politeness; and in their social hours, when formality is banished, their conversation is delightful." But, unfortunately, the Persian character is sullied by the debasing vices of falsehood and duplicity, the practice of which they even attempt to defend, as the natural consequence of the state of society in which they live. Their assertions are therefore always suspected, and the oaths which they use, to attest their veracity, are only proofs of their want of it. They swear by the head of the king, by that of the person they address, by their own, by that of their son, that they are not saying what is false; and if all these fail to convince, they sometimes exclaim, "Believe me; for though a Persian, I am speaking the truth."

The Persians are less luxurious in their habits than the Turks; instead of reclining on cushions, they sit erect on a thick felt, called *numnud*, their feet being drawn up under them, and their bodies thus resting on their heels. This is a posture very difficult for Europeans to place themselves in, with any regard to comfort; indeed, until long practice has rendered it familiar to them, their limbs get cramped if they retain it for half an hour. Like other Mohammedan nations, the Persians rise with the dawn; for according to the ordinances of the Korán, the first of the mussulman's five daily prayers must be said before the appearance of the sun. They begin by performing, with their right hands, the ablutions which their religion enjoins, the left hand never being used by this people, except in the humblest offices. They then unroll their carpets, and kneel down, placing their hands, with closed palms, on their breasts, and turning the face, as nearly as they can guess, in the direction of the holy city of Mecca, which constitutes their *kebla*, or point of adoration. In this attitude they repeat their prayers, generally in a mumbling tone, at intervals touching the ground, or rather carpet, with the forehead. Their fast is then broken with a cup of coffee, a few sweetmeats, and a *Kalioun*, or water pipe, for the Persians are passionately fond of tobacco, smoking it almost incessantly, from the moment they rise, till they retire to rest; it constitutes indeed the principal source of amusement to a man of for-

tune. About noon, the second prayer is said; after which the good mussulman may safely satisfy his appetite with more substantial fare in the shape of breakfast. Towards afternoon, a third prostration and mumbling takes place, and as soon as the sun sets, the fourth commences. An hour after that is finished, dinner is taken, the meal of greatest luxury and of longest duration in Persia, as in other countries. The fifth and last holy duty of the day is left to the discretion of the individual, with the proviso that it be performed before he retires to rest for the night.

It is the custom in Persia never to enter a room in boots or slippers, but to leave them at the door; this arises chiefly from the sacred character with which the carpet covering the floor is invested, on account of its being used in the performance of prayer. A compliance with this usage is always expected from foreigners, and seldom refused. Another point of Persian etiquette is to keep the head covered, and our countrymen speak of being obliged to dine in their cocked hats and feathers as a far more troublesome extremity of politeness than leaving their shoes at the door.

MODE OF LIVING.

THE Persians are fond of society; and the extraordinary cheapness of provisions, together with the great plenty of fruit, enables even the lowest order of citizens to live well. The poorer classes subsist principally upon bread, fruits, and water; and the repasts of the higher consist of simple fare, their cookery being free from all devices for stimulating the appetite. Sweetmeats and confections form a leading feature in their entertainments; and the consumption of these articles is immense. Indeed the shops most frequently recurring in Isfahan are those for the sale of sweetmeats, which are arranged very neatly in large China vases, clean glass vessels, and bright brass platters. The people excel in their composition, importing their sugar from India, and their sugar-candy from China. As Mohammedans, the Persians are forbidden to eat the flesh of the hog, and they are also interdicted from the use of wine. The latter rule is often broken; and as, to use their own phrase, "there is equal sin in a glass and a flagon," they usually, when they do drink, indulge to excess.

The best mode of illustrating a Persian entertainment will be to present our readers with the following account of a dinner given to Sir Robert Ker Porter, by the prime minister of the late Prince Royal of Persia. The ceremony of reception being concluded, *kaliouns* were presented,—then coffee served in very small cups, and without cream or sugar. *Kaliouns* succeeded; then tea in large cups; and after a conversation of ten minutes, the minister gave a signal for dinner to be brought. Several servants immediately entered bearing a long narrow roll of flowered cotton in their arms, which they spread on the carpet before the whole company, who were ranged on both sides of the room. This table-cloth, if we may venture to use such an expression, is called *sofra*, and Mr. Morier says it is used so long unchanged, that the accumulated fragments of former meals collect into a musty paste, emitting no very savoury smell; but the Persians are content, for they say that charging the *sofra* brings ill luck. The next service was to set a piece of thin bread or cake before each guest, to be used as a plate and napkin. Then came a tray between every two persons containing the following articles of food: two bowls of sherbet, each provided with a wooden spoon of delicate and elegant workmanship,—two dishes of *pillau*, composed of rice soaked in oil or butter, boiled fowls, raisins, and a little saffron,—two plates with melons sliced,—two others containing a dozen *kabobs*, or morsels of dry broiled meat,—and a dish presenting a fowl roasted to a cinder. The whole party being thus supplied, "the host," says Sir R. Porter, "gave the signal for falling to; a command that seemed to be understood literally, for every back became bent, every face was brought close to the point of attack, and every jaw in an instant was in motion." The Persians advanced their chins close to the dishes, and very dexterously scooped off the contents into their mouths, with three fingers and the thumb of their right hand; and the good things passed in rapid succession from the board, to the mouths of the grave and distinguished assembly. "I must say," continues this gentleman, "that I never saw a more silent repast in my life, nor one where the sounds of mastication were so audible; and I could only think of a similar range of respectable quadrupeds, with their heads not further from their troughs than ours were from the trays. For my part, whenever I wished to avail myself of the

heaps of good provender on mine, at every attempt to throw a little rice into my mouth, it disappeared up my sleeve; so that after several unsuccessful essays, I gave up the enjoyment of this most savoury dish of the feast, and contented myself with a dry kabob or two."

But if our countrymen were awkward in their attempts to accommodate themselves to the customs of their Persian hosts, the latter displayed an equal degree of clumsiness, when, in the excess of their politeness, they endeavoured to conform to the fashions of Europe. During the stay of Sir Gore Ouseley's embassy at Isfahan, the king's lord high treasurer, or second minister, invited that gentleman and his suite to a dinner, which, out of compliment to the guests, was laid out in imitation of an English entertainment. The following is Mr. Morier's account of it.

"On a number of rude unpainted tables, some high, some low, arranged in the horse-shoe fashion, were heaped all the various dishes which compose a Persian entertainment, not in symmetrical order, for their number made that impossible, but positively piled one upon the other, so that stewed fowl lay under roasted lamb, omelet under stewed fowl, eggs under omelet, and rice under all, and so on. Every European was provided with a knife, fork, napkin and plate; but the poor Persians, alas! made but rueful work of it. Some were seated upon chairs so high that they towered far above the alpine scenery of meats and stews; others again were seated so low that they were lost in the valleys. There was much amusement in observing how awkwardly they went to work, and how great was the indignation which broke out upon the faces of some of the most ravenous of them who, out of compliment to us, were deprived of their full range over such a scene of good cheer."

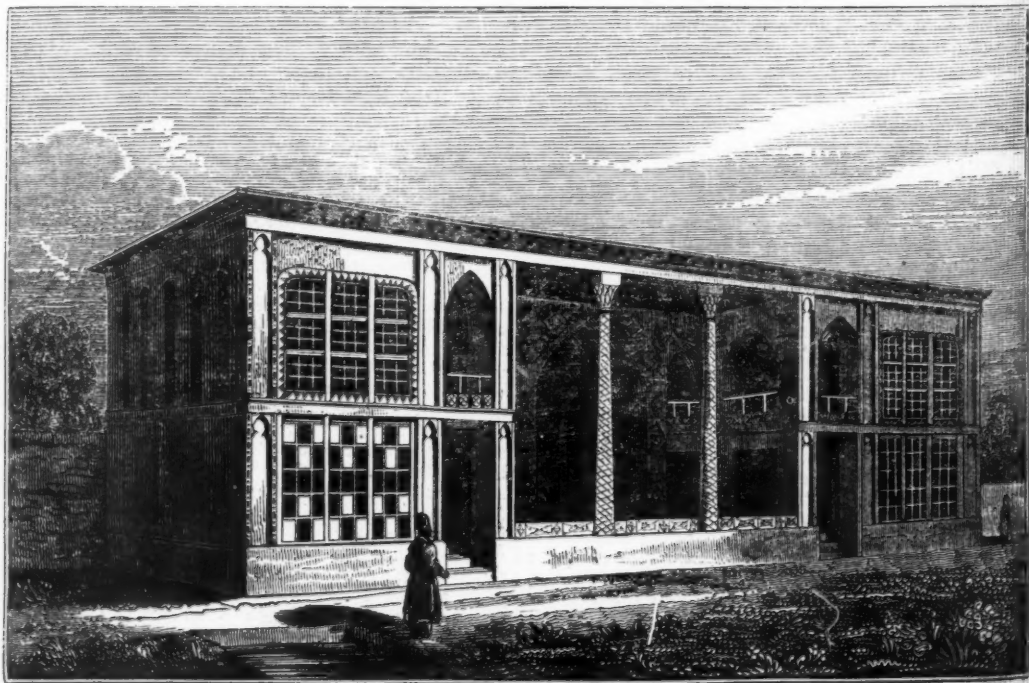
COMMERCE AND MANUFACTURES.

ISFAHAN is the first commercial city in the empire, being the emporium of the foreign trade between India and Persia, Turkey and Cabul. Its merchants resemble, in their general character, those of Bushire and Shiraz, and form a distinct class among the inhabitants of the city. They avoid all political connexions, and thus they are enabled to enjoy considerable security; for the plunder of a merchant without the pretext of some such interference on his part, would shake all confidence and be productive of much injury to the state. They are nevertheless extremely circumspect; and all their mercantile correspondence is carried on in cipher, every person having a different one, known only to himself and his agents. The authenticity of

their bills depends, not, as with us, upon the signature, but upon the seal, which has engraven on it the name of the person to whom it belongs, and the date at which it was cut. The seal-cutter keeps a register of every seal he makes, and if one is stolen or lost, his life would answer the crime of making another exactly resembling it.

Some merchants make a display of their wealth; but, generally speaking, their habits are frugal, and even penurious. The lower class are often very avaricious and sordid; and some of them, from indulging in the habit of acquiring money, become perfect misers by the time they reach old age. When the British mission was at Isfahan the popular mind was strongly impressed with this belief; and the following story was related as a fact, exhibiting, certainly, a wonderful refinement in the art of combining economy with enjoyment. A merchant who had lately died at Isfahan, and left a large sum of money, was so great a niggard, that for many years he deprived himself and his son, a young boy, of every support except a crust of coarse bread. He was however one day tempted by the description which a friend gave him of the flavour of cheese, to buy a small piece; but before he got home, he began to reproach himself with extravagance, and instead of eating the cheese, he put it into a bottle, and contented himself, and obliged his child to be so also, with rubbing the crust against the bottle, enjoying the cheese in imagination. One day that he returned home later than usual, he found his son eating his crust and rubbing it against the door. "What are you about, you fool?" was his exclamation. "It is dinner-time, father; you have the key, so I could not open the door;—I was rubbing my bread against it, because I could not get to the bottle." "Cannot you go without cheese one day, you luxurious little rascal? You'll never be rich," added the angry miser, as he kicked the poor boy for not being able to deny himself the ideal gratification.

The manufactures of Isfahan are various; the richest of them is that of brocade, which is carried to considerable perfection. This article is worn by the Persians for their outer garments on gala days; and the *kalaats*, or dresses of honour, which the king and his sons confer, are made of it. Silks and satins are also manufactured; and the cotton which grows in the neighbourhood of the city is wrought into cloths of different qualities, the principal of which resembles nankeen, and is worn by all ranks of the people, from the king to the peasant. It is also exported to Russia by the Caspian Sea, being used for the undress of the Russian soldiery. Paper, gunpowder, sword-blades, glass, and earthenware, are also manufactured, but not in great quantities.



FRONT VIEW OF A PALACE AT ISFAHAN.